

Pergamos

Revelation 2:12-17

1

Bible Basics Conference - November 2018

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The Letter to the Assembly in Pergamos

2

[12] And to the angel of the assembly in Pergamos write:

These things says he that has the sharp two-edged sword:

[13] I know where thou dwellest, where the throne of Satan is;

and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in the days in which Antipas my faithful witness was, who was slain among you, where Satan dwells.

The Letter to the Assembly in Pergamos

3

[14] But I have a few things against thee:
that thou hast there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a snare before the sons of Israel, to eat of idol sacrifices and commit fornication.

[15] So thou also hast those who hold the doctrine of Nicolaitanes in like manner.

The Letter to the Assembly in Pergamos

4

[16] Repent therefore: but if not, I come to thee quickly, and I will make war with them with the sword of my mouth.

[17] He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.

To him that overcomes, to him will I give of the hidden manna; and I will give to him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows but he that receives it.

Pergamos

5

- Pergamos
 - Situated in Asia minor (on the coast of what is now Turkey)
 - Meaning: much (or double) marriage
 - Historically, at the time of John
 - And in the Pergamos era: 313 - 606 AD

Pergamos at the time of John

6

Pergamos

- Was the 1st capital of the province of Asia
- Temple built in the honour of Caesar Augustus
 - Asclepius, the God of medicine was revered there
- Boasted of the world's biggest medical college



Revelation 2:12

7

[12] And to the angel of the assembly in Pergamos write:

These things says he that has the sharp two-edged sword:

- Pergamos
 - The church became united with the world
 - An unholy alliance
 - But: individual faithfulness (v.13)
- Presentation of Christ
 - 2-edged sword → the Word of God had lost its power / sway
 - Otherwise the church would not have followed a human 'head'
 - Judgement

Pergamos Era compared with Smyrna

8

Smyrna

- 167 - 313 AD
- Suffering and persecution
- World persecutes church
- Satan as roaring lion
- Church refined, and blossomed
- Persecutions were exceedingly cruel

Pergamos

- 313 - 606 AD
- Religious freedom
- Church linked to, and dependent on, the world
- Satan as angel of light / serpent
- Church became worldly
- Freedom and ease were much more detrimental for the church

End of Smyrna period

9

- 311 - Caesar Galerius
 - On his death bed, eaten of worms, pleaded for Christians to pray for him
 - Passes the edict of tolerance, which conceded the failure of persecution of Christians
 - For about 6 months the edict was followed, persecution halted
- Maximin, his successor
 - Revived relentless persecution, torture, etc.
 - Great famine, pestilence, boils
 - Christians cared for the deserted infected, and buried the dead
 - Pagans believed God was punishing them for the persecution of Christians

The Emperor Constantine

- Constantine - the Emperor who ended persecution of Christians
 - Lived 272 - 337
- His parents (Constantius & Helena) were favourable to Christians
- 312 - Constantine became Roman Emperor.

Constantine becomes “Christian”

312 - Battle against Maxentius

- Vision of the glittering cross
- Inscription: “by this conquer”
- The “banner of the cross”
- Constantine won a signal victory
- Declared himself Christian
- “Conversion by Superstition”



Revelation 2:13

12

[13] I know
where thou
dwellest, where
the throne of
Satan is;

- ‘Dwellest’ - the church settled down
- Throne of Satan: the world (not hell!). 2 Cor. 4:4
- God’s mind: the church is
 - Called out of the world (ecclesia)
 - Sent into the world (John 17.20).
- But in practice, the church as a body
 - accepted the Emperor's terms
 - was now united to the State
 - dwelled in the world
 - Was openly associated with the prince of this world, instead of being faithful to Christ
 - This was Babylon spiritually

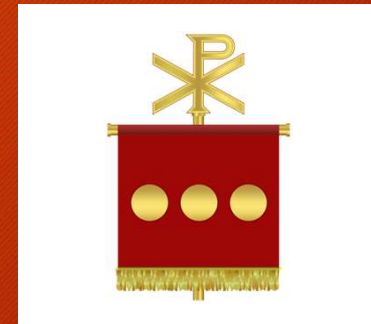
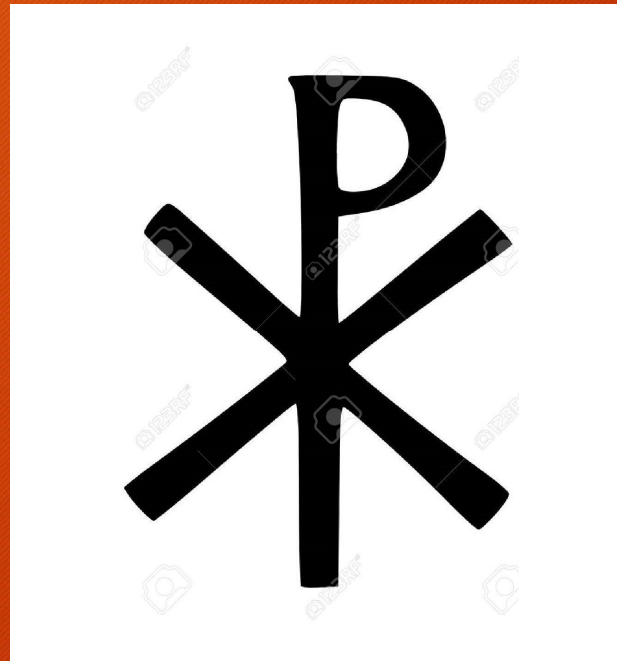
The Labarum - designed to unite Christianity to idolatry

13

Χριστός

ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ

Χ + Ρ



The Edict of Milan

Constantine

313 - Constantine signs the Agreement of Milan

- Persecution ended
- Religious freedom granted
- Church property restored
- Bishops receive senator status
- Christianity becomes recognized



Constantine and the Church

Constantine

- Became “the head of the church”
- At the same time, he retained the office of the Pontifex Maximus —the high priest of the heathen;
- this he never gave up, to his death.
- However, he bestowed great favours on Christians
 - Heathens who were baptised received a white robe + 20 pieces of gold from the Emperor
 - Christians received positions of honour.
- Never got baptised until death was approaching
 - Probably hoping for forgiveness of sins by this means



Revelation 2:13b

16

[13] ...and thou
holdest fast my
name, and hast
not denied my
faith,

- ‘thou’
 - Individual faithfulness in the face of the worldliness of the church as a whole
- Name of Christ: the truth of who He is
- Holding fast → clinging → despite opposition
- Not denied

Church Councils during the time of Pergamos

17

- Many different forms of heresy arose during the time of Pergamos
- But such heresy was mostly refused
- Five important church councils took place
 - Matters of doctrine were discussed for weeks and months at a time
 - This is not to say that the church 'teaches' or decides on doctrine
 - Nor is it to say that man made 'creeds' are the way to go
 - Nevertheless it shows that some really serious doctrinal diversions were rejected by those who wanted to be faithful to Christ

1st Council: Nicaea

18

- 325 AD
- Heresy: Denial of the Deity of Christ (Arius)
- Result: Deity of Christ upheld



2nd Council

19

- 381 AD
- Constantinople
- Rejected the denial of the deity of the Holy Spirit (Pneumatomachianism)

3rd Council

20

- 431 AD
- Ephesus
- Heresy: Pelagianism - denial of sinful nature
- Was refused

4th Council

21

- 451 AD
- Chalcedon
- Christ is true God and true man in one Person (rejection of:
 - Nestorianism ('2 persons') and
 - Monophysitism (1 nature, only divine, not human)

5th Council

22

- 553 AD
- Constantinople
- Rejection of doctrines of Origen
 - pre-existence of the soul, and
 - universalism

[13] ...and thou holdest fast my name,
and hast not denied my faith,

Revelation 2:13c

24

[13] ...even in
the days in
which Antipas
my faithful
witness was,

- Specific example
- Antipas
 - Anti = 'against'
 - Pas = 'all'
- Witness = martyr
- Faithful = true to Christ

Arian Heresy

25

- Arius
 - Is described as very acceptable in personality and style
 - But: denied the deity of Christ

Council at Nicaea (Bithynia)

26

- Held in June 325
- Attended by 318 bishops + priests and deacons
- As Constantine was ,head of the church‘ and presided over the council
- Questions of doctrine had become matters of state
 - His first reaction: „an idle question and imaginary difference“ (!)
- Lasted for over 2 months
- Defended the truth of the Lord’s deity (very few Arians excepted)
- Was endorsed by Constantine (who was swayed by the near unanimous position of the bishops).

Constantine in 325

27

“The same year that he convened the council of Nice, he gave private orders

- for the execution of Crispus, his eldest son, and*
- for the suffocation of his wife, Fausta, in a hot bath, who had been married to him for about 20 years.*

...the reader may judge as to the fitness, or rather, the unfitness, of one so polluted with blood, to sit as president in a Christian council.”

Miller's History of the Church, p.181

Constantine changes his mind, again

28

- Constantia, sister of Constantine, convinces him, on her death bed, that Arius had suffered injustice;
- Constantine invites Arius - who pleads for peace and unity
- The Emperor becomes a full supporter of Arius.

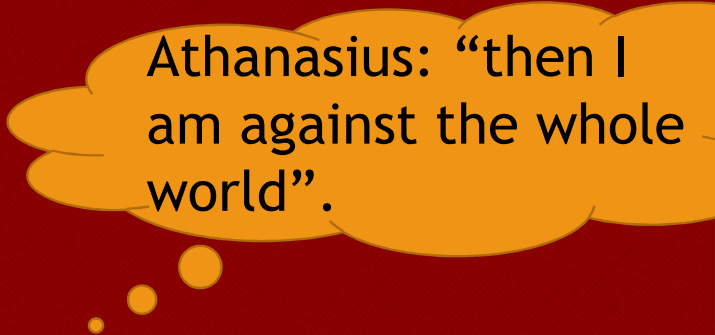
Athanasius

29

- Had been instrumental in refuting Arians at the Council of Nicaea
- Became the leader of those rejecting Arianism
 - ‘Bishop of Alexandria’
- Was summoned before Councils, and accused of all sorts of crimes:
 - Treason against Emperor
 - Magic, murder and mutilation of bishop Arsenius
 - Finally sent into exile (on false charge of stopping corn shipments from Alexandria to Constantinople)



Emperor: “All the world is against you”



Athanasius: “then I am against the whole world”.

Alexander, Bishop of Constantinople

30

- Constantine, turned Arian, commanded Alexander, bishop of Constantinople, to receive Arius into fellowship the next day, which was a Sunday.
- Alexander prayed earnestly that night
- Arius died that very night.
- Constantine died soon afterwards.

The Lord recognises individual faithfulness

31

...even in the days in which Antipas my
faithful witness was,
who was slain among you,
where Satan dwells.

Revelation 2:14

32

[14] But I have a few things against thee:

that thou hast there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a snare before the sons of Israel, to eat of idol sacrifices and commit fornication.

- No reproach to the suffering church (Smyrna)
- Plenty of reproach to Pergamos
- 1st reproach: bad doctrine tolerated (2x)
 - (1) Doctrine of Balaam
 - Ensnaring God's people in unholy association
 - Idolatry and immorality (wrong associations)
- Note: Pergamos is reproached for doctrine held by 'some' of them

Significant developments

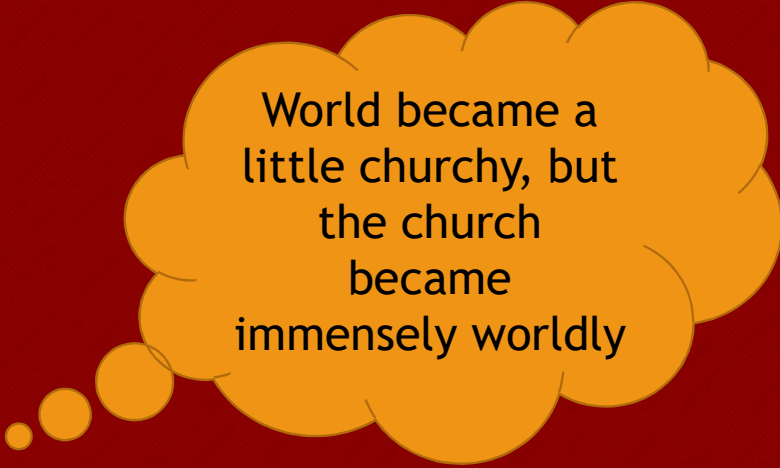
33

- Church linked to the world, and governed by monarch
- Christianity linked to idolatry
- Development of many heresies
- Pagan festivals turned into “Christian” feasts → paganism mingled with Christianity
- Introduction of
 - burning of candles in daylight,
 - incense,
 - Images, processions, purifications...

Significant developments

34

- Bishops said: Constantine's reign IS the Lord's coming! Hope given up.
- "Catholic" church - term now universally used for the 'official church' upheld by the state
- Forgiveness of sins through baptism
- Baptismal regeneration
- Infant communion
- Monasteries, nunneries and asceticism (Col 2:20)



World became a little churchy, but the church became immensely worldly

Revelation 2:15

35

[15] So thou also hast those who hold the doctrine of Nicolaitanes in like manner.

Doctrine of the Nicolaitanes

- “conquerors of the people”: clerisy “conquered” laity
- not only works, as in Ephesus, but doctrine (to justify clericalism)
- In Ephesus, these works were hated, but in Pergamus they are tolerated.

Context

- Comparison with doctrine of Balaam
- Inciting to idolatry and fornication.

Revelation 2:16

36

[16] Repent
therefore: but if
not, I come to thee
quickly,

- The Lord is still looking for repentance during the Pergamos period
- Repentance
 - change of mind
 - taking God's view of our own failure
 - (2 Cor. 7:10)
 - If the church does not repent, the Lord will have to judge

Revelation 2:16

37

[16] ...

and I will make war
with them with the
sword of my mouth.

- I come: not the rapture, a coming to 'make war'
- But: come to 'thee', but make war with 'them'
 - Those who introduce bad doctrine and practice

Example:
death of
Arius

Revelation 2:17

38

[17] He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.

To him that overcomes, to him will I give of the hidden manna;

- Exhortation to hear!
- Hidden manna → pot of manna
 - Christ in lowliness upon earth
 - But now in glory
- → encouragement for overcomer
 - Not to look for position and honour but follow Christ who was here in humility
 - Recognise Christ on high (not Caesar) as Head

Revelation 2:17

39

[17] ...and I will give to him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows but he that receives it.

- White stone: approval / acquittal / favour
- Personal approval of the Lord for what the overcomer had been for Him in his life